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ABSTRACT

Despite the lively debate and the plethora of terms used in the discussion, mass communication educators (at colleges and universities throughout the United States and the world) continue to struggle to define the direction journalism education should take. This Digest examines some of the "enduring issues" of journalism education: (1) the need to focus on service to the public; (2) the need to address challenges posed by new economic, technological, and social realities; and (3) the need to make journalism and mass communication education and practice diverse, inclusive, and global. It concludes that journalism education reveals itself to be dynamic and introspective, continuing to redefine its mission and its methods in response to evolving technologies, global culture, and the needs of the media industries and the patrons which they serve. (Contains 14 references.) (RS)

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# A Review of Trends in Journalism Education

*by Shawna Brynildssen*

Recently, Columbia University suspended the search for a new dean of its graduate school of journalism and asked faculty to develop "a greater sense of shared understanding...of where we hope to go" (Rosen, 2002). Jay Rosen, chairman of the Department of Journalism at New York University praised Columbia's willingness to question "the balance between two curricular aims in the modern journalism school." Rosen explained that of the two aims, "One builds the basic skills of reporting and editing. The other enlarges the understanding that future journalists will place behind those skills" (Rosen, 2002).

This balancing act between goals is not a new one for journalism education. Discussions between media professionals and media researchers regarding the relative values of practical skills and theoretical/liberal arts education began following WWII, and they have waxed and waned in intensity since (Dickson, 2001; Dickson and Brandon, 2000). Today, some researchers continue to discuss the balancing of skills and conceptual content (Ryan and Switzer, 2001). Other scholars, however, urge the academy to abandon this theory versus practice discussion to focus instead on how well programs teach critical self-reflection (Deuze, 2001).

Despite the lively debate and the plethora of terms used in the discussion, mass communication educators (at colleges and universities throughout the United States and the world) continue to struggle to define the direction journalism education should take. This digest will examine some of the more recent issues raised in discussions of journalism education.

## Enduring Issues

For a 2001 symposium on the state of journalism and mass communication education at U.S. colleges and universities, nine educators and professionals who have influenced communication curricula and practice were asked to comment on the "enduring issues" communication students will confront (Cohen, 2001, p. 5). These commentaries, as well as other recent articles, present several common issues:

- the need to focus on service to the public;
- the need to address challenges posed by new economic, technological, and social realities; and
- the need to make journalism and mass communication education and practice diverse, inclusive, and global.

## Serve Public, Not Industries

The first theme focuses on which master journalism education should serve. Symposium commentators said that instead of worrying whether journalism programs are producing the kinds of staffers news industry leaders say they want, journalism educators should ask whether the journalists they train are prepared to serve the public weal.

Stephen D. Reese, director of the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, urged educators to look beyond the skills students need to perform entry-level jobs. Instead, journalism faculty must strive "to educate the future leaders of this profession," and journalism scholarship must be "professional," which includes being "committed to important social ends" and "testing theory in the field" (Cohen, 2001, pp. 6-7).

Another symposium participant, Lana Rakow, called for a "new debate about professionalism" focused on service to the public rather than to media industries. Rakow warned that "...the very anxieties over convergence and new technologies that have made us rethink *what* and *how* we teach will make us sooner rather than later face the questions of *why* and *for whom* we teach" (Cohen, 2001, p. 12).

This public service focus, however, does not mean journalism educators should isolate themselves from the media industries. Rather, the academy and industry leaders need to work together now more than ever. As symposium participant John Maxwell Hamilton urged, journalism research can and should be relevant to industry leaders; educators should use their "intellectual muscle" to help the industries improve (Cohen, 2001, p. 18).

## Economic and Technological Challenges

Symposium commentator Loren Ghiglione, dean of Northwestern University's journalism school, argued that students must understand "that they cannot do their best journalism until they can put the issues of the day in historical, technological, cultural and economic context" (Cohen, 2001, p. 15). Likewise, to determine the appropriate course for journalism education, academics must address the impacts of economic, technological, and social challenges faced by today's media industries.

- *Economics.* According to symposium commentator David Brancaccio, mergers and acquisitions in the media industries in the 1990s and the development of new communication technologies have increased the influence media funding has over content. Brancaccio argues that,

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just as political science departments have focused on money and politics, "Mass communications curricula should fully embrace the equally crucial area of Money & Content" (Cohen, 2001, p. 11). Another symposium commentator Tom Jacobson concluded that the recent concentration of media ownership has created a "corporate colonization" of many newsrooms and a disturbing trend toward "infotainment." If this trend continues, Jacobson warns, journalism educators' debates about "core knowledge won't matter. The democratic system will be without a Fourth Estate" (Cohen, 2001, p. 20).

- *Technology.* According to one journalism researcher, mass communication educators generally adopt one of two distinct approaches to new technologies: incorporation or experimentation. Some educators try to incorporate new technologies into existing journalistic norms and practices. Huesca (2000), however, advocates against "mere incorporation." Instead, he argues that the academy must be willing to reinvent journalism education and experiment with "practices that are congruent with the imputed properties of cyberspace" (Huesca, 2000, p. 4). Unlike traditional news stories where a single author "exerting an authoritative voice" creates a report with a fixed reading order, a Web-based hypertext story can offer multiple perspectives and multiple narrative paths from which readers can select (Huesca, 2000, pp. 5-6). Because of this, Huesca encourages educators to be "flexible, creative, and open-minded experimenters who are not wedded to given conventions of journalism" (Huesca, 2000, p.14).

### Cultural and Globalization Challenges

Particularly in light of recent world events, several scholars have called for increased efforts to make journalism and journalism education diverse, inclusive, and global. As symposium commentator Carol Liebler noted, "[E]ducation in a homogenous setting will leave our students ill-prepared to be well-informed citizens, let alone media practitioners, in this global village" (Cohen, 2001, p. 8).

In the United States and elsewhere, educators and journalists must recognize the various social and national levels (Starck, 2000; Morgan, 2000). At the same time, educators must encourage students to see beyond their nation's boundaries (Bartram, 2000; Holm, 2002). National, physical, social, and cultural borders are beginning to "erode," in part because of the rapid growth in the concentration of media ownership. For this reason, journalism educators should break away from the traditional national approach and focus student efforts on "critical self-reflection" that can improve understanding of transnational social and cultural issues (Holm, 2002, p. 70). Much work remains, however, to make journalism and mass communication programs more diverse. One research review found that so far, few departments are developing either multicultural courses or materials (Manning-Miller and Dunlap, 2002).

### View from High School Educators

The apparent difficulty experienced by college-level scholars wrestling with the "skills versus concept" balancing act may not be shared by their high-school level counterparts. As one Florida teacher explained, high school journalism seems to be "the most overall perfect course" precisely because it requires students to blend their knowledge base with practical experience (Evanchyk, 2000, p. 10). Nor do enrollment statistics suggest that high school graduates entering college are daunted by the prospect of balancing skills and theory. In fall 2000, undergraduate enrollment in U.S. journalism and mass communication programs increased dramatically as enrollment reached an all-time high (Becker et al, 2001).

Journalism education today thus reveals itself to be dynamic and introspective, continuing to redefine its mission and its methods in response to evolving technologies, global culture, and the needs of the media industries and the patrons which they serve.

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